



Washington State Senate

The Benton Bulletin

17TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT UPDATE FROM SENATOR DON BENTON

APRIL 11, 2005

Dear Friends,

As always, it is my pleasure to report to you about what is happening in your state Capitol during the regular 105-day legislative session, which at this point, is nearly complete.

It is my privilege and duty to keep my constituents informed. However, I would like to be **cost-conscious** as well. **If you can receive the Benton Bulletin via e-mail**, please e-mail me at benton.don@leg.wa.gov and put "Benton Bulletin" in the subject line. Please include your name and address in the body of the e-mail so I can remove you from the snail mail list.

It has been an extremely busy couple of weeks with the proposal of the Senate operating, transportation and capital budgets. The House has also released its versions of these proposed budgets. Ultimately, the final budgets will be compromises between the House and Senate, which are both controlled by Democrats.

THE SENATE'S OPERATING BUDGET

The Senate Democrats passed their \$26 billion proposed spending package on March 30 after rejecting Republican amendments that would have saved taxpayers more than \$450 million. The Senate Democrats "solve" the \$1.5 billion budget gap with the following (among other things):

- \$469 million in tax increases (reimplementing a portion of the estate tax declared unconstitutional by our state Supreme Court, and a 60-cent-per-pack tax increase on cigarettes)
- \$646 million in shifts, transfers and new revenue (I call this smoke and mirrors – it does not represent any real solutions)
- \$328 million in delaying pension funding until future biennia (a dangerous trick to play with money the state is forgoing in investment gains and will ultimately have to pay more)

Last week, Senate Republicans released a more responsible, sustainable plan. The proposal spends less than the governor, House and Senate proposals and utilizes less one-time money than any proposal so far, does not raise taxes, and leaves \$520 million in the state reserve accounts. The Senate Republican proposal would:

- Protect taxpayers – No new taxes
- Protect pensions – No skipping of a pension payment
- Protect education – Fully fund I-728 and I-732 while expanding access and providing more than 10,000 new enrollments for higher education
- Protect the environment – No raiding of environmental accounts, provide free access to state parks
- Protect accountability – Create a more sustainable budget that reduces reliance on one-time funds, enacts more ongoing savings, and leaves a larger ending fund balance

THE SENATE'S TRANSPORTATION BUDGET

The plan to increase transportation-related taxes and fees raises \$9.1 billion over 16 years to pay for more than 200 highway, bridge and intersection improvements throughout the state. It raises the funds in the following ways:

- **The state gas tax** will increase 3 cents per gallon in 2005 and another 2 cents in 2006. Beginning in 2007, the gas tax will automatically increase by 1 cent per year for the next 10 years. For someone who drives 15,000 miles per year and gets 25 miles per gallon, the additional tax will be \$2.50 more per month in 2006 and \$7.50 more per month in 2016.
- **A weight fee** will apply to all vehicles. This new fee would be in addition to the annual \$30 car-tab fee: \$5 for compact cars; \$15 for big cars or pickup trucks; and \$25 for SUVs. Motor home weight fees will depend on the weight of the motor home.



Senator
Don Benton

Committee assignments:

- Financial Institutions, Housing & Consumer Protection, ranking Republican
- Government Operations & Elections

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Senate Republicans win removal of controversial local fees

Originally, the plan called for the repeal of I-776 so that city and county councils could impose a local license-tab fee of up to \$20 per year, rising to \$30 per year in 2015. City and county governing bodies would have also been authorized to enact an ordinance imposing an excise tax on housing units of up to \$4 per month; an excise tax on businesses of up to \$2 per employee; and a special property assessment of up to \$50 per year.

I am appalled that the Legislature would write a blank check to the state Department of Transportation without first following through with recommendations of the previous governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation. We should first improve the way we do business and make building roads more efficient and effective by putting in place real performance audits and passing legislation to reduce environmental mitigation costs that can eat up as much as 30 percent of project costs.

THE SENATE’S CAPITAL BUDGET

The following capital projects important to the Vancouver-area are funded in the Senate’s proposed capital budget:

- **The Lewis and Clark Confluence Project** – \$1.5 million;

- **The Vancouver Barracks Project** – \$1 million;
- **The Columbia Springs Environmental Education and Research Facility** – \$700,000;
- **The Clark Center for Community Health** – \$3 million;
- **Washington Wildlife Recreation Program** – \$90.67 million statewide (six Vancouver-area projects are likely to be funded); and
- **The Columbia River Channel Deepening** – \$17.7 million

The Washington State University Vancouver campus was also appropriated more than \$22.5 million for various projects.

Again, it is my pleasure to provide you a brief update throughout the legislative session. Once more, if you are able to receive these updates via e-mail, I encourage you to help me cut costs. As always, it is my pleasure to serve you. Please don’t hesitate to contact me or visit me during session in Olympia anytime.

Sincerely,

DON BENTON
State Senator, 17th District

Please use this space for any comments, suggestions or problems you would like me to know about. Or call the toll-free Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000.



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